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ABSTRACT

This examination of political and social attitudes of American youth in the 1980's begins with a comparison of the youth of the 1960's with the youth of the 1970's. Results from four major studies are presented and a composite picture of youth in the eighties is presented. Findings show that the personal and professional values of American students today appear to be an intensification of many of the commitments which developed in the seventies toward good jobs, marriage and the family, and general personal fulfillment. The social and economic inequities which were at the core of the concerns of the sixties do not greatly interest the youth of the eighties. However, major contradictions are evident, presenting a disjointed picture of attitude dualities. For example, while there appears to be more conservativism, patriotism, and pride in the country, apathy, cynicism, and lack of involvement also exist. Moreover, while there is widespread agreement that international war/nuclear disaster is the major problem on the minds of youth today, very few have in any way acted on these fears. Four tables present study results showing: (1) ratings of various life goals considered "very important," (2) student political attitudes based on a 1980 survey, (3) college student attitudes toward world issues, and (4) American teenagers' perceptions of freedom in the world. The document concludes with possible explanations for the duality of attitudes found among today's youth. (LH)

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WHAT ARE AMERICAN YOUTH THINKING? AN EXAMINATION OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES OF AMERICAN YOUTH IN THE EIGHTIES*

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What are American youth thinking? What are the social and political attitudes, interests, and concerns of youth in the United States in the eighties? Have they changed since the seventies and the sixties? What issues, what desires, what fears are on the minds of young Americans as we approach the mid-eighties?

The knowledge, opinions, and attitudes of American youth are being scrutinized rather closely these days in the current national atmosphere of critical review of education. Although extensive data have become available, an incisive description is not easily formulated. The various research efforts focus on differing groups of American youth -- high school students, college students, and non-school youths. They also focus on somewhat different topics. Several studies have investigated social-political attitudes specifically. Others have examined a very broad range of personal and social opinions. Differences in research objectives and research design also complicate an effort at synthesis. One must beware of overgeneralizing. Consequently, while the various research efforts offer detailed segments of the picture of American youth today, one cannot expect to get a perfect jigsaw-puzzle fit of the pieces. Nevertheless, I

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feel that it is possible to extract appropriate findings from the abundant available research to develop a richly detailed mosaic of the political and social opinions, attitudes, and interests of youth in the U.S. today.

The Seventies: A Base for Comparison

Before looking into the current scene, as a point of comparison, I think it is beneficial to briefly review youth attitudes in the United States in the seventies. Studies conducted in the early and mid-seventies (20,11,17,18) indicated that American youth were turning away from the radical politics, the campus rebellions, the sharp criticism of American institutions, the acceptance of violent protest as a means to change and the passionate concern for minority rights which characterized the sixties. Criticism of the military, big business, and the major political parties gradually declined on college campuses and students' concern over law and order increased as they expressed a strong sense of entitlement to public social services such as social security, medicare, and environmental protection (20,17).

The life styles of American youth were changing as well. The attire of the sixties "flower children" -- granny glasses, long hair, and free-flowing nonconformist clothing -- gradually disappeared from prominence as did living in communes, underground newspapers, rejection of the value of education, and the exaltation of the youth drug culture. In high schools there were fewer demonstrations and petitions by students demanding smoking rooms, a voice in school policies, and the right to dress and wear their hair as they pleased.

American youth began to turn attention toward personal fulfillment by means of career and job accomplishments. Political expression did not

cease, however. Students of the seventies spoke out on environmental issues, consumer protection issues, and a need for political reform made evident to them by the Watergate scandal. There is some evidence that dissatisfaction with the responsiveness of the political system had not declined much (17,18) and that students had come to view petitions, marches, and protests as usual or acceptable means of political expression along with voting. But seventies youths favored peaceful demonstrations; they clearly rejected violence (20).

Cross national research (19) carried out in 1971 provides further insight into political attitudes of the seventies. American high school seniors, when compared to pre-university students of six other nations, had the lowest scores on scales measuring support for democratic values. On the other hand, the U.S. students scored the highest on a test of support for the national government. Beneath the patriotism and commitment to the U.S. and its democratic heritage, the students were found to be relatively lacking in tolerance, anti-authoritarianism, and positive attitudes toward civil liberties. In an interesting German-American comparison of the authoritarian attitudes of adolescents, Lederer (9) found significant decreases since 1945 in the authoritarian attitudes of both Americans and Germans. In 1979, however, German youths had significantly less authoritarian attitudes than American youth.

The great "generation gap" of the sixties narrowed considerably in the seventies. High school students were becoming less critical of their parents' social values, and the severity of philosophical conflicts between the generations lessened (11). Meanwhile on college campuses values and viewpoints moved closer to those of mainstream America (20).

Yankelovich[1] (20) probed subsets of seventies attitude data, made comparison to earlier studies, and found interesting value conflicts a)

among the subcultures of American youth and b\ in the sets of values catching hold on college and university campuses. I want to pause to mention these findings because they point to patterns which I believe may be useful in understanding attitudes of the eighties.

From a comparison of attitudes expressed by young people from working class families to those of college students, it was determined that the political discontent, rejection of traditional values, and new social norms which were associated with college campuses in the sixties were evident in working class youths in the seventies. Yankelovich postulated a social pattern by which the more extreme positions of smaller groups of young people are gradually adopted in diluted form by larger groups of young people and then spread to the mass society. An example cited was the criticism of major political and business institutions on college campuses in the sixties which became part of the mainstream youth culture of the seventies.

Yankelovich further discerned two sets of conflicting values emerging among American youth in the seventies. For example, while negative attitudes toward materialism and money grubbing had continued from the sixties, at the same time there was a growing interest in careers and jobs which pay well. These differences were interpreted as evidence of a broad adaptation of new values generated in the previous decade, while a moderate reversal was taking place in certain traditional value areas.

The Eighties: Sources of Information

Although we are only 3 1/2 years into the decade, a wealth of survey data is already available from which to piece together a picture of the attitudes of the eighties generation in the U.S. Several very recent studies of high school and college students in the U.S. will be used here

to obtain a composite of opinions and attitudes of American youth.

For an examination of American high school students, I will draw information mainly from four studies:

1. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) 1983 survey of a national probability sample of 1500 students (11). The students polled were from selected households representative of the national population in geographic distribution, population density, and family income. Appropriate male-female representation was also included. A similar survey was conducted by NASSP in 1974 which allows for some comparison over the decade.
2. The National Center for Education Statistics "High School and Beyond" studies (12,13,15), particularly the 1980 and 1982 data. Research in this program is designed to provide longitudinal statistics on educational aspirations and work and career choices of American high school students during and after their schooling. The highly stratified national probability sample drawn from over 1100 high schools utilized data from over 30,000 sophmores and 28,000 seniors in 1980 and somewhat smaller followup samples of the same youths in 1982. Written questionnaires administered in school and some telephone interviews were used to collect the data discussed in this paper.
3. The Gallup Youth Survey (6) which periodically collects opinion data from a representative national cross-section of approximately 500 teenagers aged 13-18. The teenagers are polled by telephone at home. Survey results are prepared into news releases which are distributed by subscription through the Associated Press in New York. The Gallup Youth Survey has been measuring the opinions of teenagers since 1977 and maintains a data bank of the results. The

polls used in this paper were selected from 1982-1984 releases.

4. A 1980 survey of the political attitudes of 573 metropolitan Atlanta area secondary school youths conducted by Hepburn and Napier (8). The Opinionaire on Political Institutions and Participation was used to survey a representative group of 320 eighth graders and 253 twelfth graders. The sample tapped both urban and suburban parts of a large county which is experiencing a major influx of population from the north and midwest.

The attitudes of American college students in the 1980s are examined through information drawn from two studies:

1. A 1980 survey of the global understanding of American college students conducted by the Educational Testing Service for the World View Project of the Council of Learning (2,3). The researchers used a probability sample of college and university students stratified by school type, location, and estimated student ability as well as by level within colleges or universities. Questionnaires were administered on campus by campus coordinators. Sampling was carefully controlled to represent the entire college-university population.

2. A very recent nationwide mail survey of attitudes on public political issues conducted by U.S. News and World Report (10). The study especially focuses on attitudes regarding war, especially nuclear war. The 825 respondents (55% of the 1,490 polled) were from over 100 colleges and universities. However, no apparent effort was made to shape a sample representative of the total college and university population in the U.S. Results of this poll, therefore, cannot be considered to represent the attitudes of all American college students. The data, nevertheless, are very timely with the study

having been conducted in early 1984 and published in April.

From each of these surveys, data which focus on political and social attitudes have been selected for their contribution to a composite picture of American youth in the eighties.

Personal Goals in the 1980s

Similar to the American youth of the seventies, high school and college students today are characterized as "obsessed by grades and careers" (10). They tend to immerse themselves in narrow personal concerns and set goals of personal happiness over considerations of the well-being of the society. An example can be seen in the results of the High School and Beyond study where students were asked to rate various goals by their importance (Table 1). High School sophmores of 1980 (12) showed highly personal priorities. Of greatest importance were: success in work (85%), marriage and a happy family life (83%), steady work (84%), and strong friendships (82%). "Having lots of money" was a relatively low priority, but the very lowest were "correcting social and economic inequalities" (14%) and "being a leader in my community" (10%). The only high priority that can be considered somewhat other-directed was a concern for giving "my children better opportunities that I've had." Two years later in 1982 when these students were seniors their life goals had changed very little. The only notable change was a further decrease in their interest in community and group life including friendships, parents, and community leadership.

High school seniors in 1980 (13,15) also rated success in work, steady work, and marriage and family very highly. They also gave their lowest ratings to goals of community improvement and community leadership. It is interesting to note that in 1972, 29% of the seniors rated "work to correct social and economic inequalities" as very important, which is over twice

the percentage (13%) of 1980 seniors. Following the 1980 senior group into their work and college locations in 1982 (Table 1), we find an intensification of interest in marriage and family life along with a notable decline in the goal of "having lots of money" was found. Strong friendshipd declined slightly in priority, and community and society goals remained relatively low.

Table 1

Percentage of High School Sophmores, Seniors, and Graduates Various Life Goals as "Very Important"

Life Goals	1980 Sophmores	1982 Seniors	1980 Seniors	1980 Seniors in 1982
Work:				
Being successful in my work	85%	86%	88%	83%
Having lots of money	35	33	31	22
Being able to find steady work	84	85	84	82
Family:				
Finding right person to marry/ having happy family life	83	84	81	88
Being able to give my children better opportunities than I've had	73	71	67	67
Living close to parents and relatives	21	16	14	16
Community/Society:				
Being a leader in my community	10	8	10	8
Working to correct social and economic inequalities	14	12	13	14
Other:				
Getting away from this area of the country	15	13	14	9
Having strong friendships	82	79	82	78

(Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 1983).

Further evidence of personalism and the retreat from social consciousness by eighties teenagers in the U.S. is found in the 1983 NASSP study

(11). Given an opportunity to assign points to seven life areas in terms of the importance attached to them, the high school students gave highest ratings to: "immediate family," "work and career," and "friendships." "Influence on society" ranked the lowest, with "personal development," "extended family," and "spiritual and religious activity" in between.

Given an opportunity to identify **the one thing I want out of life**, the high school students most frequently listed "career success," "happiness," and "marriage and family." "Love," "freedom and independence," and "peace of mind" — values that are readily associated with the sixties — ranked near the bottom of the list.

Reflecting on these goals one must take into account the economic conditions of the late seventies and early eighties. Undoubtedly, fears of unemployment and the resulting desire for economic security have contributed to these values. Nevertheless, I am struck by the degree to which American youth in the eighties are preoccupied with **individual** aspirations and **individual** accomplishments and their lack of concern for community productivity and community solutions. I am reminded of Newmann's critical analysis of school education, particularly social studies education, as obsessed with individual rather than collective interests (14). He has decried the overconcern with individual rights and individual development in education and the lack of concern for developing perceptions of interdependence, skills of cooperation, and an overall collective identity. These data provide further fuel for his criticism. They provide evidence that the attitudes and values of American youth have moved increasingly away from the community-oriented concerns of the sixties. These are the personal values of the seventies students, only more so.

Education for Which Jobs?

Consonant with the emphasis placed on career, job, and family life,

today's youth view postsecondary education with increasing value. NASSP (11), on examining the educational aspirations of American high school students in 1983 found that 54% intend to enroll in four-year colleges and universities — an increase of 20% over the 1974 study. Another 15% intend to go to junior college, and 13% more plan to go to vocational or training schools. Thus 85% of high school students today express a desire to continue their schooling beyond high school.

What types of jobs appeal to youths today? According to the 1980 census only 52% of American workers hold white collar jobs. However, when teenagers 13-18 were asked in a recent Gallup Poll what kind of work they planned to do in the future, 84% projected white collar jobs. Only 16% of the teenagers expressed an interest in blue collar, service, trade, or agricultural work. The top three career choices of young men were in the areas of 1) computer and electronics, 2) medicine, and 3) business. For young women the top three were: 1) medicine, 2) secretarial, and 3) nursing. (6; 10-12-83)

Youth values regarding careers were further revealed when teens were asked to rate occupations by their importance for scholarship funding. Top ratings were given to scientists (83%), doctors (79%), teachers (50%) and businessmen (44%) — four careers considered worthy of national financial support. Possibly teenage attitudes on the topic have been shaped partly by some mass media focus on the importance of science and medicine in world progress. That teachers fared so well in the poll is somewhat surprising in a society which does not well reward teachers with either funds or prestige. (6; 11-16-83)

Overall, American teenagers seem satisfied with the way things are going in their personal lives. In both 1980 and 1983 82% expressed such

personal contentment - a full 7% more than adults (6; 3-23-83). This personal satisfaction seems rooted in an optimism that their personal aspirations can and will be realized regardless of whatever problems exist in their society and in the world.

In summary, the personal and professional values of American students today are an intensification of many of the commitments which developed in the seventies to steady work, good job, self-rewarding career, marriage, family, and home life. Many of the attitudes prominent in the sixties seem to have been reversed. The "generation gap" seems to have closed to a tiny crack as the attitudes of American youth move closer to the adult mainstream. As one researcher views it the goals of American young people are closer to their parents than at any time in the last 30 years (10).

Attitudes Towards the Nation, Government, and Politics

In contrast with the high degree of personal motivation and personal satisfaction expressed by American youth, a majority are not satisfied with conditions in the nation. Only 41% of teenagers expressed satisfaction with the state of the nation in 1983; yet, it was an 18% increase from the satisfaction shown during the Iranian hostage crisis in 1981, but 11 percentage points below the 52% approval found in 1979 (6; 8-24-83).

As low as their approval may seem, American teenagers since the late seventies have expressed **higher** levels of satisfaction with national conditions than have adults. For example, in contrast to the recent 41% approval by teenagers, a similar survey of adults indicated that only 24% were satisfied. Even within the teenage sample it is evident that approval of the state of the nation tends to decline with age. Of the 13-15 year olds polled, 49% expressed satisfaction with national conditions compared to

only 33% of the 16-18 year olds. As might be predicted, there is a notable difference by race. Only 20% of black teenagers, compared to 43% of white teenagers, were satisfied with the way things are going in the U.S. (6; 8-24-83). One cannot resist speculating about whether Jesse Jackson's candidacy for the Democratic nomination and the strong identification and involvement of black youth with his campaign will make a difference in the next survey.

The distrust and cynicism regarding politics which were voiced by young people in the post-Watergate seventies have declined to some degree. However, the majority of high school students still do view politics as corrupt. In 1974 nearly 75% of the high school students in the NASSP survey believed that corruption and dishonesty were widespread in American government. Today a little less than 2/3 of the students hold that view (11).

American high school students in the eighties are generally loyal to their country but cannot be considered "rabidly patriotic." For example, in 1983 95% agreed that a person can disagree with the government and still be considered loyal — a 15% increase from 1974 (11). A similar tolerance was found among college students but to a lesser degree. In 1980 only 27% of the freshmen and 18% of the seniors agreed with "I'm for my country, right or wrong" (1).

Among college students renewed interest and greatly increased enrollments in ROTC (reserve officers military training) on college campuses are being interpreted by some observers as a resurgence of old style patriotism (10). But it does seem likely that part of the explanation is economic. Students who join ROTC usually receive funds for books and tuition, and in the recent period of greatly reduced federal education loans, this is no

small attraction. In addition, the stigma associated with military uniforms and military careers appears to have faded in the more conservative national climate making the ROTC option more attractive on most college campuses. Younger students (13-18) are sharply divided on the question of mandatory national service: 59% favor national service for men while 37% are opposed, and 47% favor national service for women with 49% opposed. Only 38% of all of these students prefer military service to non-military service (6; 4-20-83). So, although there is renewed support for national service the majority are not committed to military service.

Political Participation

Teenagers seem to have some interest in talking about politics. A total of 40% of those aged 13 through 18 would like to spend more time discussing politics with their parents (6; 3-14-84). Remarkably, politics is the second highest rated topic of interest in this poll. Family finances (46%) was the only topic which ranked higher than politics as a topic of desired conversation with parents. School, drinking, drugs, religion, and sex were topics of less interest than politics. Especially the 16 through 18 group (48%) desired more discussion of politics at home. Urban students (48%) expressed the most interest in politics as did students from the East (44%) and the West (43%) when compared to the Midwest (41%) and the South (36%). Young women (42%) showed a slightly higher interest in politics than young men (40%).

This presidential year is also contributing to increased interest in politics and political participation by college students. Potential Democratic nominees Gary Hart and Jesse Jackson have attracted high turnouts among college students at campaign rallies, and, on some campuses, large numbers of students have signed up to work on fund-raising, voter registra-

tion, and other aspects of the campaigns (10).

Political parties, however, are not terribly popular with today's high school students. About 25% of the students identify with the Democratic Party and 25% with the Republican Party. Given the typical textbook admiration for the "independent voter," it is surprising that less than 10% declare they are independents. The largest portion, 40%, say they are undecided about which party can best represent them. This very low level of party identification is not completely surprising given the low level of satisfaction with national political conditions. Political socialization research has demonstrated a linkage between feelings of political impatience and lack of faith in government with the lack of party support (16).

It is interesting to note that significantly more males than females identify with the Republican Party and consider themselves conservatives, an indicator that the so-called "gender gap" in American politics is a reality among American youth. There is also no strong support of or rejection of the Reagan administration among high school students. In 1983 only 12% felt "very confident" of President Reagan's ability to lead the country; one-third expressed "non confidence" while a little over half said they were "somewhat confident" (11).

There are numerous other indicators of unsure position and lack of clear thinking politically. Few high school students can pinpoint their beliefs on a liberal-conservative continuum. Only 13% view themselves as "liberal;" only 14% consider themselves "conservative;" and 40% say they just do not know where their political views fall on such a continuum (10)! This is a remarkable change from 1974 when a majority of high school students described their position as "middle of the road." The involvement level seems also to be low. Even though 3/4 say they will vote when they are eligible, clearly 2/3 of today's high school students show no desire

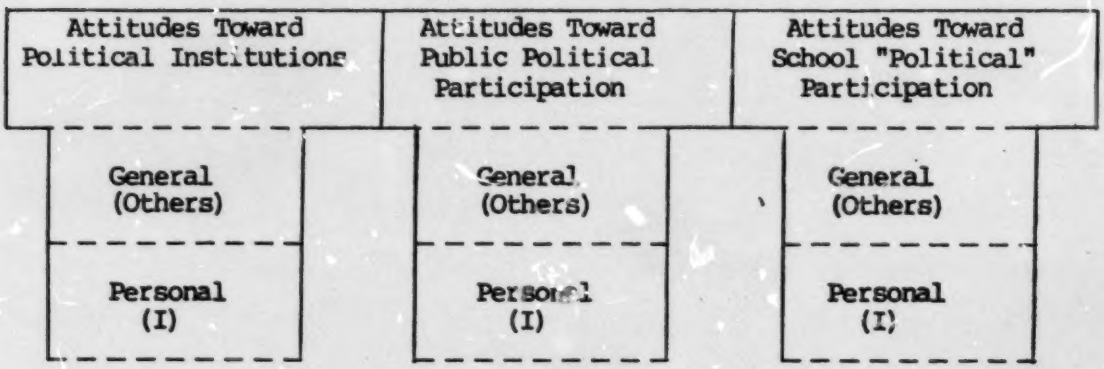
for political involvement beyond voting (11).

The non-partisan, undecided, uninvolved pattern of American youth in the eighties suggests a trend toward non-position or non-ideology. Of course, we must take into account the overall context, the general depoliticization in American society. As Sigel and Hoskins (14) have documented, it takes a politicized environment to stimulate the political involvement of youth. However, as noted above, we do find both college and high school youths responding to very specific, often personal issues and to individual candidates. Activism appears to be borne of non-ideological considerations. The non-position politics of youth today appear to be evidence of a continuing decline in ideological cohesion which was observed developing in high school students in the late seventies (18) and which seems to be the political mode of the eighties.

Overall the political attitudes of American youth in this decade appear to be a conflicting "mixed bag" of supportiveness, patriotism, and interest on the one hand, and apathy, cynicism, and lack of involvement on the other. A study of student political attitudes which a colleague and I conducted in 1980 may provide some insight into the differing attitude dimensions and sources of conflict in the attitudes of youth (8).

We developed a 48-item opinionnaire to measure three political attitude dimensions — attitudes toward political institutions, public political participation, and school political participation. Hypothesizing that each of these dimensions had an I-they or self-other dichotomy, we developed six subtests to tap each of the subsets of political attitudes shown below.

Student Political Attitudes



Overall test results showed positive attitudes toward political institutions and political participation in both eighth and twelfth grades. Close scrutiny of the six subtests by race, however, revealed differences in several dimensions of political attitudes and some inconsistencies. For example, white students in both eighth and twelfth grades had significantly different mean scores in the I/Other dimensions of attitudes toward political institutions. The white students general attitudes toward political institutions were more positive than their personal reactions to these institutions (Table 2). A slight personal disaffection with political institutions which showed up by eighth grade was more evident by twelfth grade.

Attitudes toward public political participation were consistent for both black and white students in both the general and personal dimensions with no significant difference between them. There was no problem of conflict in the subsets of participatory attitudes. In regard to school participation (i.e., school governance, club activity, making and changing of rules by protest and other means, etc.) however, the dichotomy in attitudes was found again for white students in both grades (Table 2). While

attitudes toward general participation in school activities were increasingly positive, there was significantly less inclination to become personally involved in school activities.

Table 2

Student Political Attitudes - 1980 Survey

Overall and Subtest Results by Grade and by Race

(Means, Standard Deviations, and Confidence Intervals*)

Subtest (8-items using 3-point scale)	Statistics	Eighth Grade White (N=243)	Eighth Grade Black (N=75)	Twelfth Grade White (N=201)	Twelfth Grade Black (N=49)
Political Institutions Others	Mean	20.0	19.0	21.3	19.9
	S.D.	2.5	2.5	2.2	2.3
	C.I.	19.7-20.3	18.4-19.6	21.0-21.6	19.3-20.5
Political Institutions Self	Mean	19.2	18.9	19.6	19.1
	S.D.	2.4	2.3	2.3	2.3
	C.I.	18.9-19.5	18.4-19.4	19.3-19.9	18.5-19.7
Public Political Participation- Others	Mean	19.9	19.3	20.8	19.5
	S.D.	2.1	2.1	2.2	1.8
	C.I.	19.6-20.2	18.8-19.8	20.5-21.1	19.0-20.0
Public Political Participation- Self	Mean	19.9	19.2	21.0	20.0
	S.D.	2.4	2.5	2.3	2.8
	C.I.	19.6-20.2	18.6-19.8	20.7-21.3	19.2-20.8
School Political Participation- Others	Mean	21.3	19.9	22.7	21.2
	S.D.	2.6	2.7	1.7	3.3
	C.I.	21.0-21.6	19.3-20.5	22.5-22.9	20.3-22.1
School Political Participation- Self	Mean	19.7	19.6	19.6	20.0
	S.D.	2.6	2.8	2.9	2.7
	C.I.	19.4-20.0	19.0-20.2	19.2-20.0	19.2-20.8
Overall	Mean	119.9	115.9	125.0	119.7
	S.D.	9.9	10.1	8.8	10.7
	C.I.	118.7-122.1	113.6-118.2	123.8-126.2	116.7-122.7

(Source: Hepburn and Napier)

* 95% confidence intervals of the means were calculated and compared. Means were considered significantly different when confidence intervals did not overlap. See Hepburn and Napier (8) for discussion.

Black students made no significant positive changes in attitude between the eighth and twelfth grades. Moreover, compared to white students at each grade level, black students had significantly lower overall attitude test scores at both eighth and twelfth grades. By twelfth grade black students showed a negative difference from whites in all of the "others" subtests, indicating significantly less general confidence in political institutions, public political participation, and school participation. Apparently the attitudes of black students stabilize by eighth grade; after eighth grade, school and other learning experiences do not promote a growth of positive attitudes about principles of the political system.

Reflecting on the results, one must ask why notable self-other differences in attitude showed up in the school participation dimension and to a lesser degree in the political institutions dimension for white students while public political participation attitudes showed no self-other dichotomy. In regard to political institutions and school participation these students seem to be saying, "People **should** get involved, but I probably would not." It seems likely that attitude differentiation is affected by the two levels of learning taking place in schools. The informal curriculum of school-life experiences (often referred to as "the hidden curriculum") may be teaching a personal skepticism in regard to the responsiveness of political institutions, particularly the school. The formal curriculum, on the other hand, positively projects the ideal of public political participation in the students' future. While the future experience looks rosy, the present political experience may appear relatively gray and less appealing. Apparently, white students can better accept these future-oriented ideals. Black students express significantly less faith in political institutions and public political activity.

Issues on the Minds of American Students

What national and international problems do American youth consider to be important? Several recent studies have assessed the major national and world issues on the minds of high school and college students in the United States and turned up some interesting results.

High School Students and National Issues

Asked what are the most important national problems in the U.S., high school students this past year identified unemployment (52%), inflation (21%), and violence and crime (21%) as the top three problems (11). With much lower frequencies, poverty (6.4%), health and welfare (5.5%) and energy (4.9%) were selected as the fourth, fifth, and sixth most serious problems. On the top three national problems students were in a high level of agreement regardless of their family income level, age group, or region.

Compared to 1974 there have been some interesting changes in student perceptions of national problems. In 1974 political corruption (Watergate), ecology, and unemployment were named the top three domestic problems. Today ecology has dropped to ninth and it is named by only 3% of the students. Political problems have faded from the students' major concerns, but crime and violence which were barely mentioned in 1974 (.5%) is the third most serious internal problem perceived by high school students today.

Further exploring their attitudes on several national social issues, the 1983 study (11) revealed that high school students in the U.S. are supportive of a number of liberal social measures. Seventy percent felt that there should be a guaranteed annual income; 84% approve of a national health plan which would provide "adequate health care for all;" 64% believe their government should provide decent and sanitary housing for all Ameri-

cans; 65% disagreed with the view that "if people are unable to find jobs it is their own fault;" and 59% expressed a preference for spending money on social needs rather than military needs. But, in a seemingly inconsistent view about how to utilize national resources, 54% believe nuclear weapons are necessary to protect the United States.

Responses regarding other social issues also show additional liberal-conservative inconsistencies. While only 10% are opposed to the use of the death penalty, 70% of the students support handgun control legislation. Expressing their belief in local community control of schools (69%) as the means to the "best education," the high school students also expressed overwhelming agreement (99%) that local school officials should be able to censor books and materials used in schools. A total of 92% believe that the nation needs stricter laws to control the use of the insanity plea (apparently a reaction to the acquittal of John Hinkley who attempted to assassinate President Reagan). On other social-moral questions attitudes are clearly split: 54% of the students oppose the legal availability of pornographic material to adults; 59% oppose the legalization of marijuana; 56% believe the legal drinking age should be raised to 21, and 52% believe in continued legalized abortion.

High School Students and International Issues

High school students consider "nuclear disaster" (32%) and "threat of World War III" (21%) as the two major problems of the world. (If "nuclear disaster" is interpreted as war-related, then 53% or a majority appear to be concerned about war.) Poverty (15%) and overpopulation (11%) follow on the list of important world issues, and environmental problems (6.5%) is fifth. In 1974 overpopulation and environmental problems were perceived as the two most important problems in the world (11).

College Students - National and International Concerns

War seems to be the major national and international issue on the minds of college students. In April of this year a national news magazine reported results of a national poll of college students which indicated that approximately 30% of all students expect a nuclear war in their lifetime (10). Although 36% believe such a war would not happen in their lifetime, 35% were "unsure." Half of the college students polled predicted that nuclear war would occur before the turn of the century; another 45% estimated it would happen in the next century. It should be noted that this poll makes no claim to representing all college students, but it did tap over 100 colleges and universities.

When this same sample of students was asked what country is most likely to begin a nuclear war, 48% responded the Soviet Union, 26% Middle East or Third World countries, 8% the United States, 7% Terrorists, and only 3% predicted joint action by the U.S. and Soviet Union. However, over 76% believe that both the U.S. and Soviet Union are responsible for encouraging the arms race. Sixty-one percent do not believe that a nuclear war could be limited in scope, and 58% think that there would be virtual total destruction of lives and property.

In spite of this concern about the potential for nuclear war, 75% of the college students polled said their fears had not affected their life-style or work habits. Only 9% were encouraged to work for nuclear disarmament; 12% said they were drawn closer to family and church; 9% said they were "rarely, if ever, concerned about the issue;" 5% said they felt anger, frustration, and worry, and another 5% said they adopted an "eat, drink, and be merry" philosophy!

When asked if President Reagan is doing enough to prevent nuclear war,

33% felt that he was (22% of the females and 43% of the males), but 43% said that he was not (48% of the females and 39% of the males), and 24% were unsure (30% of the females and 19% of the males). Only 19% of the students favor an immediate unilateral freeze on development of nuclear weapons in the United States; 28% oppose such action; but the majority of the college students (52.8%) favor a "freeze" if the Soviet Union will agree to a similar freeze.

Another study of college students investigated their perceptions of major world issues. The study was conducted in 1980 with a national probability sample of university and college students in the U.S. (2). Perceptions of each of eight world issues were examined through a set of statements. The statements were rated on a five point scale (1=low, 5=high). I have selected four of the statements and on Table 4 indicated the percentage of students who gave the highest rating to each statement in relationship to each of the eight issues.[2]

Freshmen and seniors were clearly in agreement that **international conflict** was the world problem of most importance. A total of 92% of freshmen and 90% of the seniors gave this problem the highest rating as an important problem. Likewise, in the rank ordering of world issues freshmen and seniors agreed on second and third most important problems. The **depletion of natural resources** ranked as the second highest rated problem in the world and **inflation** was ranked third in importance (Table 4).

All of the issues listed, but one, were perceived as highly important by over 60% of both freshmen and seniors. The exception was **intergroup conflict** which was rated highest in importance by only 26% of the freshmen and 33% of the seniors. Apparently cross-national conflict is considered by American students to be a far more serious problem than internal

Table 3

COLLEGE STUDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD WORLD ISSUES

Percentage of Freshmen and Seniors Giving Highest Rating to Four Statements[2]

Statement A. This problem is important.
Statement B. I know a lot about this problem.
Statement C. The American government can do a lot to solve the problem.
Statement D. International organizations can do a lot to solve the problem.

	Freshmen (N=1060)				Seniors (N=1046)			
	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D
Environmental Pollution	64%	7%	31%	28%	70%	11%	37%	32%
Denial of Basic Human Rights	67	9	29	31	68	11	23	35
Unemployment	75	17	44	13	71	18	36	9
Intergroup Conflict	26	3	5	14	33	5	7	16
Depletion of Natural Resources	86	22	48	32	87	24	50	36
Inflation	80	22	48	22	77	19	41	14
Malnutrition and Inadequate Health Care	75	13	35	45	75	13	35	47
International Conflict and War	22	24	48	56	90	21	47	51

(Source: Barrows, Educational Testing Service, 1981)

conflicts among interest groups. The relative lack of open clashes, particularly violent clashes, in the U.S. may explain these ratings. Perhaps lack of understanding was also a contributing factor. The survey overall showed that intergroup conflict was the issue perceived as the least important, least interesting, least understood, and least solvable!

Half or nearly half of the college students revealed rather naive, isolationist convictions that the American government on its own can solve problems of **international conflict and war**, the **depletion of natural resources**, and **inflation**. There is a notable difference in views between freshmen and seniors regarding unemployment. While 44% of freshmen are highly convinced that the American government can solve this problem, only 36% of the seniors take this stance. We can assume that in four years of college, students do gain some world perspective on unemployment problems. There is much less confidence that the U.S. can do much about malnutrition and human rights problems in the world. It is interesting to note that these are two of the three issues in which a higher level of confidence is expressed for international organizations to find solutions.

None of the problems was perceived as well understood by the college students. Even students in their final year of college or university gave relatively low ratings to their feelings of being informed. Fewer than 25% consider themselves well-informed on any of the issues.

The Knowledge-Attitude Relationship

Although it is not the purpose of this paper to deal with research examining the actual knowledge levels of American youths, it should be noted that this same research project conducted by the Educational Testing Service (2) also tested college students knowledge in 13 topic areas related to international issues. The knowledge test items were not drawn

up to test knowledge taught in specific courses in college. Rather, the committee which oversaw the test development sought to define the knowledge needed to understand global events, stituations, and processes.

As reported by the researchers, the results of the knowledge tests revealed numerous misconceptions which are widely held by college students at all levels. On subjects such as the consumption of fossil fuels, population growth, and general causes for malnutrition, 35 to 55 percent of the students were misinfomed. Seniors, on the average, correctly answered only one-half of the 101 knowledge questions, and freshmen averaged only 40% correct. Fewer than 15 percent of the seniors and fewer than 10 percent of the freshmen got over two-thirds correct.

Obviously these unsatifactory levels of knowledge of world affairs must have some influence on the attitudes of college people. Many of the attitudes reported above have been formed in the context of a lack of information or are based on misconceptions. Very few college courses address world problems directly. Economics courses are likely to address problems of inflation and unemployment, and political science courses may examine problems of international conflict and environmental issues, but they do not necessarily take a world view of those problems. The standard college curriculum in the U.S. does not prepare American youths to understand world issues, nor does exposure to mass media (2).

Based on the total results of the full battery of knowledge and attitude tests given to college students in this study, it was concluded that from the perspective of global understanding large portions of the students had attitudes and perceptions which were "unenlightened or unproductive." In the search for possible factors which influence attitudes, the researchers found statistical associations between global attitudes and 1) reading international news in newspapers, 2) proficiency in foreign

language, and 3) visiting and/or living in other countries. Attention to television news showed no relationship, and no association was found to taking global studies courses, the main problem being that very few such courses were reported. The researchers noted that students reported more frequent discussion of global issues in their high school experiences than in college (3).

A survey of high school-aged teenagers released just a few months ago (6: 3-7-84) further documents the shallow understanding of global affairs by American youth. Teenagers in a representative national sample were asked to state their perceptions of the degree of freedom in each of 14 countries Results are shown on Table 4. While these young people believe that freedom is extensive in the U.S. and Canada, only 56% believe that the British have a great deal of freedom, and only half view the French as very free. Italy, Japan, and West Germany are perceived as having considerably less freedom than the United States. Although the students did distinguish between East Germany and West Germany, the percentage for the Federal Republic of Germany is surprisingly low.

One has to wonder about the sources for these beliefs. Are they rooted in the study of the past? Students in all states of the U.S. must study history. Their textbooks describe the Axis powers of World War II and the "cold war" struggle that followed the war. But few students have the opportunity to systematically study recent and current world affairs. For knowledge of current affairs most young Americans probably depend on the mass media. It seems likely that sensational television coverage would have heightened awareness of the lack of freedom in Iran, Soviet Union, Poland, and the People's Republic of China (referred to as "Red China" in

Table 5

American Teenagers' Perceptions of Freedom in The World

	"A great deal" of freedom	"Only some"	"Very little"	None
United States	90%	8%	2%	
Canada	81	14	3	
Great Britain	56	30	8	1
France	50	37	7	1
Italy	43	37	12	2
Mexico	35	41	18	4
Japan	34	39	19	3
West Germany	19	38	30	7
India	17	39	30	5
East Germany	7	26	42	17
"Red China" (PRC)	6	36	36	24
Poland	4	19	48	23
Soviet Union	2	8	37	50
Iran	2	12	50	30

(Source: Gallup Youth Poll, 1984)

the poll, which may in itself have biased responses). For too many American teenagers it seems that perceptions of the world are based on the stereotypes and oversimplifications produced by episodic and often non-analytic school and mass media treatment of such topics as the Hitler era, World War II, the Berlin wall, the cold war, U.S.-Soviet power struggles, and the Iranian upheaval.

Summary and Commentary

What picture do we obtain when we attempt to fit together the various pieces to form a mosaic of American youth today? The overall image is that of the seventies intensified — a further return to the traditional values of a good job, marriage and family; a fixation on personal bread and butter issues and a turning away from community and group problems. It again appears that the newer conservative attitudes of college students the decade before have become widespread among American youth. The social and economic inequities which were at the core of the concerns of the sixties do not greatly interest youths of the eighties. At first viewing, we get the picture of a highly conservative generation turned inward on a self-centered world.

When we look more closely, however, the picture has shadows and double images. Major contradictions are evident. In contrast to the high level of personal satisfaction, we find dissatisfaction with national conditions. There is a cynicism about politics, but there is also a high degree of interest in talking about politics. While on the one hand, there is patriotism and pride in country, there is also a rejection of the notion of "my country right or wrong." There is a clear commitment to mandatory national service, but not to military service. American youth support defense spending, but at the same time they are highly supportive of liberal social measures such as a national health plan, public housing, and unemployment compensation. While they espouse the liberal view on handgun control, they strongly support the conservative stance on local textbook censorship.

It is no wonder that very few youths can describe their political beliefs in terms of a liberal-conservative continuum! Even their expressed

anxiety about war has its contradictions. While there is widespread agreement that international conflict/war/nuclear disaster is the major problem on the minds of youth today, very few have in any way acted on these fears. Few have become highly informed, few have become active in anti-war or anti or pro-armament groups; the large majority have turned away from these worries and immersed themselves in personal concerns.

On close scrutiny, the attitudes of American youths of the eighties offer a study in contradictions, a disjointed picture of dualities. Sometimes conservative, sometimes liberal; somewhat open-minded, somewhat narrow; to some extent world-minded, to some extent isolationist. What are some possible explanatory factors?

In my estimation there are several things operating. One consideration is the current cultural context in which the attitudes of American young people are being shaped. The relative economic instability of recent years plus the conservative political climate in the nation have developed a particularly heavy focus on individuals and individualism and on the nation and nationalism. Today's youths in America may be suffering from a pernicious absence of what Newmann (14) describes as "collective identity." Interest in the betterment of community life, commitment to productive group activities, and the sense of interdependence and community responsibility seem to be at particularly low levels. At the same time young people appear to be aware that the solution to most major problems depends on some sort of community action.

The I/they dichotomies in the attitudes of adolescents toward political institutions and toward school participation may well be a symptom of the lack of collective identity. These dichotomies also suggest that the school itself tends to discourage the notion of community productivity and fails to provide the climate or teach the skills necessary to democratic

community involvement. The limited comprehension of democratic principles evident in American youth of the seventies (17,19) appears more serious today. A recent NCSS publication (7) provides evidence that school climate, teaching approaches, and administrative style do make a difference in how well students learn to function in democratic communities, but we are still a long way from actual application of these ideas in more than a small minority of schools. Thus, most students spend most of their waking hours in an institution which teaches one set of ideals about the political and social world but presents a very different set of realities. Since students live in a school world of contradictions and dichotomies, their split attitudes are a logical result.

Another likely contributor to the duality of attitudes in the eighties is the adaptation and diffusion of values of the previous generation which continues in the manner in which Yankelovich (20) perceived it a decade ago. Some of the old liberal values adhere while newer more conservative social values are catching hold. Thus college students who are mostly concerned about attaining success in a chosen career are also committed to public housing and unemployment insurance. They tend to support spending for social needs rather than military needs, but believe nuclear preparedness is necessary. Their synthesis of values might be characterized as "getting the most from both liberal and conservative viewpoints."

Finally, a factor which I estimate influences these value contradictions and seemingly compartmentalized attitudes is the lack of needed knowledge. The complexities of world affairs are exacting to scholars of world politics, but to young people who have conspicuous knowledge deficiencies and are aware of those deficiencies, the effect must be overwhelming. Very recent studies which showed serious inadequacies in the international understanding of both college and high school students

indicate that they are formulating their opinions and attitudes about world affairs on skimpy knowledge foundations. Political and social judgements choices are made in a mental context which may be likened to a tight-fitting knit cap intricately woven of information and values. Clearly, deficiencies of information affect the quality of those choices. The Atlantic Council is among the groups calling for attention to knowledge needs, warning that democratic societies in the world can survive only if those who espouse democracy comprehend it (1).

In summary, all of these factors point to education -- schooling, family and community experience, and the mass media. In recent years school curricula in the U.S. increased the study of careers and practical work skills while the study of foreign language, current events, and world cultures suffered. Daily television has offered large doses of situation comedies, soap operas, and self-centered video music. The effects of inflation and unemployment on consumerism and overall lifestyle have undoubtedly dominated teenager-parent conversations in many homes. These are just a few homely examples of the ways in which attitudes are formed. More positive, consistent, and productive democratic and world-minded attitudes can only come from changes in education and socialization. Therein lies the challenge for those of us concerned about social and political education, and that is why we are here in Irsee examining the problems and looking for solutions.

FOOTNOTES

1 The Yankelovich research team conducted a study in 1973 which involved one-to-two-hour interviews with a national sample of 3,522 Americans aged 16-25, including a probability sample of all households and a representative selection from two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

2 Percentages of highest ratings from the data appendices are reported here rather than the mean ratings and rank order reported in the text of Barrows, COLLEGE STUDENTS KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS, because of errors found in the text tables. The editor confirmed these errors in a telephone conversation and provided corrections, but it was at a time too late to change the paper.

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